No. 8

"WHAT HATH GOD WROUGHT."

A

HISTORICAL DISCOURSE

PREACHED JUNE 25TH, 1876, ON THE COMPLETION OF A TWENTY-FIVE YEARS MINISTRY

IN THE

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, NORFOLK, VA.

BY

GEORGE D. ARMSTRONG, D. D., Pastor.

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"It shall be said of Jacob and of Israel, What hath God wrought?"
Numbers 23:23.

This, the last Sabbath in June, completes the twenty-fifth year of my ministry in Norfolk. In answer to the call of this Church, having resigned my place in what is now Washington and Lee University, I came hither and, on the first Sabbath in June, 1851, commenced my labors among you.

During all these years God has guided and kept and blessed us. They have been eventful years to our Church. At no other period in its history have so many and so great changes been crowded into so brief a space as in the twenty-five years last passed. A month of pestilence or war is often equal to years of quiet life in the changes it makes, and in the lessons it teaches; and both pestilence and war have fallen to our lot during these years. For this reason I have thought it proper, and hope it will prove profitable, to-day briefly to review the history of this period, "that we may remember all the way by which the Lord our God hath led us, to humble us, and to prove us, and to know what was in our heart."

As I attempt to recall the Church and congregation as they were twenty-five years ago, by the aid of memory to fill these pews again, as they were then filled from Sabbath to Sabbath, my first thought is of the changes, the great changes which these years have wrought, and the same thought presents itself if I turn from our own to other churches of the city. Of all the pastors who filled the pulpits of our different churches in Norfolk and Portsmouth twenty-five years ago, I alone remain. Of all who were officers of this Church twenty-five years ago, Pastor, Ruling Elders and Deacons, I alone remain. Of the two hundred and seventy-four members whose names appear in the manual printed shortly after I came here, forty-two only appear in the manual just printed, and of these not more than twenty are in the house to-day, large as the congregation is.

This change in our Church and congregation is, in part, a consequence of growth, and so an evidence of life in the Church. Not a

few of those whose names have disappeared from our register have gone out from us to form or to strengthen other churches of kindred faith with ours. They are not lost to the service of the Master, but called of Him to labor in other parts of the field, where they are laboring to-day as faithfully and more efficiently than would have been possible had they remained with us. As they went out from us, we gave them a hearty "God speed ye;" and as we think of them now, in the same spirit we add as hearty a "God bless you." Such changes, though involving a loss to a particular church, and the breaking up of old and cherished associations, yet are they a gain to the cause of Christ; and therefore in all such changes we can and will rejoice.

By far the greater number of the names, however, which have disappeared from our register, have disappeared because they are no longer the names of the living. As nearly as I can tell, one hundred and sixty-six out of the two hundred and seventy-four who were enrolled twenty-five years ago, have passed away from earth.

At first thought, this seems a sad fact to record; and yet, if we look at it in the light of God's word, we will see that it is only in seeming, not in reality, it is sad. "And I heard a voice from Heaven," writes the Apostle John, "saying unto me write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth; yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors, and their works do follow them." Rev. 14:13. That the tired laborer should rest from his labors; that the faithful laborer—faithful through grace—should hear from the Master's lips the welcome, "Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord," should be a cause of rejoicing, not of sorrow, to all that laborer's friends.

And to the Church her members removed by death are not lost. In our every-day life in the world, we are so accustomed to deal with the things of sense, that when we turn our attention to the kingdom of God, we often fail to use that vision of faith which the Spirit gives, and so see what is real, yea, eternal but in part. To the eye of faith it is but an inconsiderable portion of the true Church which, at any particular time, is present upon earth. In the language of our venerable Confession, "The Catholic or Universal Church, consists of the whole number of the elect that have been, are, or shall be gathered into one under Christ the head thereof." [Confession of Faith, chap. 25, Art. 1.] In the language of an old hymn, dear to many of us through its associations with the past—

"For all the servants of our King,
In Heaven and earth are one.
One family we dwell in Him,
One Church, above, beneath,
Though now divided by the stream,
The narrow stream of Death."

In the Apocalypse, Jesus having shown his servant John the sad spectacle of short-coming and faithlessness presented by the portion of His Church on earth, when He would encourage him to expect the Church's final triumph, "opens a door in Heaven," and to the prophet rapt up thither grants a vision of the portion of the Church in Heaven, a vision of "the four and twenty elders sitting enthroned, clothed in white raiment, and having on their heads crowns of gold." Rev. 4:4. Just how and in what ways the Church in Heaven is laboring as one with the Church on earth to hasten the coming of the kingdom of God, the scriptures do not tell us; but of the fact they leave us in no doubt. Our dead members are not lost to the Church, but are workers together with Christ, and with us the living members, in the great work assigned the Church in the world.

Turning from such reflections as these, I will now briefly sketch the history of our Church for the twenty-five years last passed:

For the first four years of this period our Church had a steady, quiet growth. The only event in its history calling for special notice on this occasion being the setting off of fifteen of our number to form the High Street Church, Portsmouth.

The Presbyterian Church of Portsmouth was originally a colony from this Church, having been organized in 1822. In the division which rent in twain the Presbyterian Church of the United States in 1837-8, forming the two bodies popularly known as the Old and New School—a division now happily healed—the Norfolk Church as a whole adhered to the Old School. The majority of the Portsmouth Church, on the contrary, sided with the New School, whilst a minority withdrew and connected themselves with the Norfolk Church.

Thus it came to pass that at the time I took charge of this Church, I found quite a number of its members resident in Portsmouth. This number increased until it was deemed advisable to maintain a regular weekly service among them—a service held from house to house. In the Summer of 1852, with the hearty approval of the session of our Church, these members, fifteen in number, were organized into a new Church, under the name of the High Street Church, Portsmouth. In the autumn of that year they called and

settled the Rev. Robert J. Taylor as their Pastor. Under his charge the Church prospered, and in the Spring of 1862, when our two cities were evacuated by the Confederate troops, and Mr. Taylor left them to serve as a chaplain in the army, they numbered fifty-eight communicants, and were nearly ready to assume the position of a self-sustaining Church.

By the war the two Presbyterian Churches of Portsmouth suffered such loss in members, that when peace returned, following the example of the bodies to which they respectively belonged, which had then happily united, they also united, forming what is now known as the Presbytesian Church of Portsmouth. The extent of their loss during the war appears in the fact that of the one hundred and sixty communicants the two churches numbered in 1862, only fifty eight remained to form the present Church in 1865.

The Portsmouth Church is thus, in part, an out-growth of our Church during the last twenty-five years. From its re-organization in 1865, it has grown steadily, until now, it is a self-sustaining Church, numbering one hundred and three communicants.

The Summer of 1855, is the one which will long be known among us as "the Summer of the Pestilence." In the year 1850, a malignant form of yellow fever desolated the city of Rio, South America. Like the cholera, "a traveling epidemic," this fever can be traced as it moved steadily northward, along the Atlantic coast, until in 1854 it raged with great violence in the cities of Savannah and Charleston, especially in Savannah ; and in 1855 it appeared and did its fatal work in our midst.

What the intimate nature of these "traveling epidemics" is, just how they spread from point to point as they move onward in their course, and in what their deadly poison consists I do not pretend to know. But that they do possess a character well described by the title, "traveling epidemics," will not admit of question. The cholera, which in 1832–3, swept with such terrible fatality over portions of our country, can be traced eastward, month by month, and year by year, to its origin in India, as clearly as the course of the tornado can be traced through the forest, and by the same means, too, the desolation which marks its track.

The epidemic of yellow fever, from which we suffered in 1855, was more fatal in Norfolk and Portsmouth than in any of the cities in which it had before prevailed. This, as I think, was not because it increased in malignity as it moved onward in its course, and not

because the sanitary condition of our cities was worse than that of the cities in which it had previously prevailed, but mainly for two reasons: first, it commenced with us early in July, and so had all of three hot months, before the frost came, to do its fatal work in; and, second, so long a period had elapsed (more than thirty years) since the yellow fever had prevailed in our cities before, that very few of our people were protected from its fatal attacks by having already had the disease in a milder form.

Commencing early in July, the epidemic raged with greatest violence during the first week in September, and before the last week in October, when the frost put a final check to its ravages, it had swept over the whole of our two cities, and almost disappeared from lack of food to feed upon. As I have attempted to recall the scenes of that Summer, that I might tell you something of the story of those times, memory brings them up rather as the scenes of a troubled dream than of a reality I have known in the past. It is a general law of our nature that intervening years shall dim the recollection of great sorrows and great trials, and I thank God it is so. But for this merciful provision our later life would be all dark with the shadows of the sorrows of our earlier years.

Doing the best I can, I will relate a few incidents of that Summer, selecting such as belong to the history of our Church for the period now under review:

Early in August, when the yellow fever, in an epidemic form, was universally acknowledged as existing among us, and having ravaged Portsmouth had begun to spread in our city, a panic seemed to fall upon our people, increasing from day to day, and great numbers fled, some in one direction some in another, until not more than one-third of our white population were left to grapple with the pestilence.

In speaking of this flight as the result of a panic, I would be understood as simply stating a fact, and not as censuring or in any way disapproving the course of those who fled. On the contrary, had I reason to believe that the yellow fever in an epidemic form had appeared again among us, my advice would be, to every one that could get away, to go, and to go at once. As I look back, I thank God for that panic, and I believe it was sent of God to preserve to His churches here "a seed alive in the earth."

In April, 1855, our Church reported to Presbytery two hundred and ninety-six communicants, of whom about two hundred and fifty were resident in the city. On looking over the communion roll on

the first of September of that year, I found that eighty-seven were all that remained in the city. Of this number there was but here and there one who escaped the fever altogether, and thirty-two, more than one-third, died. But the number of deaths, great as it was, does not measure the loss of our Church from the fever. The breaking up and scattering of families by the death of the head, occasioned an indirect loss greater than the direct loss by death. In December I wrote to a friend: "In the few months last passed God's own hand has thrown down the building of years. Our Church, as to numbers, stands pretty nearly where it did ten years ago. In all the congregation present on last Sabbath I saw but three families that were not clad in mourning, and in every part of the house there were vacant seats, the accustomed seats of those who shall no more meet with us here below; and among the missing ones are some of our best members."

On the first Sabbath in September, this Church and St. Paul's, across the street, were the only Churches opened for divine service in the city. The pastors of all the others were away, or attending upon the sick in their families, or sick themselves, or dead. I recollect the day well, for it was the last Sabbath upon which any attempt was made to have public service in our churches until after the fever had run its course. A bright, beautiful day it was, the sky without a cloud, a refreshing sea-breeze moderating the heat of the season (and we had many such days during the prevalence of the fever), just such a day as at other times would have given us a full house. On that day but a mere handful gathered here, for the people, like their pastors, were away or attending upon the sick, or sick themselves, or dead. Leaving the pulpit and calling the few present up around me, I read a portion of Scripture and led in prayer, feeling that in all probability we should never all unite again in God's worship here on earth, and so it proved. When after the fever had spent its force we assembled in God's house, more than one of that little company had passed away for ever.

The remainder of the day, both before and after public service, was devoted entirely to visiting the sick and the dying, and almost every house had the sick or dying among its inhabitants; many were literally hospitals, with hardly enough well to take care of the sick. The week ushered in by this Sabbath was the one during which our people were driven to the necessity of burying the dead in pits, as in the great plague in London. The place of these pits, in which corpses

in rough coffins and boxes were piled layer upon layer, is marked by no monument, and perhaps it is best it should be so. If among those dead bodies there are those of God's saints, and I believe there are, we may rest assured that He whose eye shall search the ocean's depths for "the dead in Christ," will find them even there, and that the haste and apparent dishonor of their burial shall in no way dim the glory of their resurrection. Throughout that week and the week following, the busy city and the quiet cemetery seemed to have changed places, and by the end of the time "God's acre" preented the appearance of a ploughed field.

The exact number of those who died from the pestilence will never be known. For months after the fever was over, it was a common occurrence for one of our citizens to miss some old friend or acquaintance then for the first time, and on instituting inquiry about him to learn that he had "died in the fever." Forming a judgment from the best data I could obtain at the time, I estimated the number of the dead at not less than two thousand, and this out of a population of about five thousand, the number who remained in the city—and fully one-half of them died during the first two weeks in September. There were seven Protestant ministers on duty here who remained in the city with those who could not or did not get away. These all had the fever and four of them died. Of our resident physicians who remained a similar statement may be made, all had the fever and more than half of them died.

What was the religious effect upon our people of this terrible visitation of the pestilence? To this question I make answer: The impression was a salutary one upon two classes at the least. Upon Christians the effect was to call into active exercise the Christian graces of "brotherly kindness and charity." Little differences for the time were all forgotten, and Christians dwelt together and labored together as members of one family. Never at any other time have I ever seen as near an approach to the condition of things which characterized the first planting of the Christian Church in Jerusalem, and described in the words "they that believed were of one heart and one soul; neither said any of them that aught of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things common." Upon thoughtful persons, many of them long thoughtful on the subject of religion, the effect was a happy one. In several instances, in our own congregation, persons who had been hesitating, doubting, holding back, were brought to a decision, and this, not upon their

sick beds, but whilst themselves in perfect health, by the felt presence of God in the pestilence around them.

Upon those who were thoughtless and devoted to the world, no lasting impression seemed to be produced. Business with its absorbing interest was at an end; the revel and the dance ceased for a season, and when the pestilence first broke in its might upon our city all seemed stunned for a little while, but it was only for a little while. While the pestilence was at its height, the gay and worldly seemed to have as little real concern as at other times, thus furnishing an illustration of the truth set forth in Scripture in the word: "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead."

In the case of the vicious and abandoned, the effect of God's judgment was only to harden. Thieves stole from the dying and the dead, and in one instance within my own knowledge, a drunkard, who in a sober hour had been engaged to nurse a sick man, stole and drank the brandy provided by the physician for his patient, so that the morning light disclosed the sad spectacle of the dead patient and the drunken nurse lying side by side.

At an early stage of the pestilence, Hunter Woodis, then Mayor of Norfolk, fell a victim to his zeal and devotion in seeking to alleviate the sufferings, and in other ways provide for the sick poor. At his death Dr. Nathan C. Whitehead, one of the Ruling Elders of this Church, as Senior Magistrate, succeeded to the office of Mayor, and by his excellent judgment, and his firm impartial administration of justice, put a check upon such crime as I have just referred to. Those of our people who were here, and who understood the nature of the danger which then threatened us, in the addition of lawless violence to all our other sufferings, alone can know how great the service he rendered our city, and by all such, I feel sure, he will ever be gratefully remembered.

The subsequent effect of this visitation upon our people at large was not such as I had hoped for. Often, during the years which followed immediately upon the fever, I felt like taking up the lamentation of the prophet, "Lord, when thy hand is lifted up they will not see." Our records show that the number of communicants added to our Church during the two years next succeeding "the Summer of the Pestilence," were not enough to make up the loss from death and removal during those years. Then followed three years of quiet steady growth of the Church, so that in April, 1861,

we reported to Presbytery two hundred and sixty-two communicants.

In 1861, the war—what, I suppose, we of this generation will always speak of as *the* war—began, and continued until the Spring of 1865. More than ten years have now passed since the war closed, and I think I can speak of the events of the years of war, at least, of such of them as enter properly into the history of this Church, without passion, certainly without any bitterness of feeling.

Opposed to the war in the first instance, and praying and laboring, in my place as a minister of the Gospel, to avert it, when Virginia by vote of her convention entered the Confederacy of the States, I heartily approved of her action, and from that hour to the close of the war, as a matter of conscience and in the fear of God, I tried to do and to bear my part in the conflict. I mention this because I believe that in this particular, my case was just that of the great body of Christian people in the South. This fact alone will explain the other fact, that our Christian people were able to carry their religion with them throughout the war and into the army. I am sure I never preached the Gospel with a more earnest desire to save souls than during the closing months of the war, spent in laboring as a missionary in the Army of Northern Virginia. I am equally sure that I never preached to more attentive congregations than the congregations of soldiers, sometimes gathered on the hillside, but more frequently, as the season was Winter, in the rough log chapels which they had built for themselves along the lines in front of Petersburg. Some of the most cherished memories connected with my ministry are memories of this period.

During the two years which followed the evacuation of Norfolk by the Confederate troops, and until forcibly removed, I occupied the pulpit in this Church regularly, filling, as best I could, the place to which God had called me. These years, especially the latter portion of them, were years of trial in many ways, one only will I mention: The most persistent effort was made by the military commander of the district, General Benjamin F. Butler, to compel our ministers to pray for our rulers, particularly the President of the United States—not in the way and spirit in which the Scriptures instruct us to "pray for Kings and all in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty" (I Tim. 2:2), for this we were not only ready to do, but habitually did in the public service in the sanctuary,—but so to pray for the President as to identify the praying Church with the cause he represented and the

course he was pursuing. [See note A.] I thank God that grace was given me to refuse to lead this Church in any such hypocritical mockery of Jehovah, as such prayer would have been for our people at the time. As I recall these efforts of General Butler now, I look at them with amazement, not so much at their wickedness as at their folly; and I am ready to ask, will man never learn the first principles of true religious liberty? Will man never learn that true religious faith and service cannot be imposed at the point of the bayonet?

During these two years my congregations in this Church, and so also in Portsmouth when I was able to preach there, were as large and often larger than in peaceful times. The explanation of this is to be found in the fact, that many of those who occupied the position of pastors in our churches at the time of the evacuation, either then or afterwards, voluntarily left the city and went within the Confederate lines, whilst the Church buildings of others, St. Paul's for example, were taken possession of by military authority and ministers from the North placed in their pulpits. This was the case with our Church building, for a short time, after my removal. [See note B.] At the time of my arrest but one other of our Protestant pastors remained in occupancy of his pulpit in the city. As they lost their pastors, such of the people as were left behind, gathered around those of us who remained, and thus it came to pass that this Church was usually full, when opened for divine service, with a congregation of Episcopalians, Methodists and Baptists, as well as Presbyterians; and at no time since I first came among you have I been kept busier in ministerial labor out of the pulpit, in visiting the sick and burying the dead, than during these months. And my ministry was not a fruitless ministry. At almost every communion season some were found ready to come out openly and profess their faith in Christ. At our Spring communion in 1863 twelve were added to our Church, and at the Spring communion in 1864, on the last Sabbath I was permitted to spend with the Church until the war was over, five were added.

I have had occasion several times to refer to my forcible removal from the Church; my "deposition," as it was ridiculously styled in the published "order" of the day, and my imprisonment and subsequent banishment following thereupon. Having been placed of God as I believed, in this pulpit, I never voluntarily left it. Having taken pastoral charge of this Church, I never, of free will, deserted

my post. Of my forcible removal from the pulpit, if viewed as a military measure, I have no disposition to complain.. War is, in its very nature, made up of acts of violence, and what would be gross injustice in time of peace, may, in time of war, be a military necessity. Of my subsequent hard imprisonment I feel differently, [See note C.] but as it does not specially concern the history of our Church, I will say only this respecting it: That my imprisonment was for no crime I have ever felt ashamed of; for no sin I have ever repented of.

My forced absence from my pastoral charge lasted for fifteen months, from the first of March, 1864, to the last of May, 1865. I returned to Norfolk by the middle of April, of the last mentioned year, but it was not until the close of May that the order for my "deposition" was revoked, and I was allowed by the military government, which then existed here, to occupy the pulpit again.

For the greater part of the time during these fifteen months of my absence, public service on the Sabbath was conducted by the two Ruling Elders of the Church who remained in the city. In God's good providence we had in our session, at the time, a man eminently fitted for such an emergency. To most of you, there will be no need for me to say that I refer to William D. Bagnall. Possessing naturally a clear mind and retentive memory, Mr. Bagnall had improved these gifts of God by a judicious course of reading, persevered in for years, until he became more thoroughly acquainted with the history and doctrine of our Church, as well as with Scripture truth in general, than many of our ministers; and thus he was eminently fitted to supply a pastor's place in his absence. His sterling integrity none ever questioned. His warm-hearted, unaffected piety all had confidence in. And when, in this season of sore trial to this Church, he stood up on the Sabbath to expound the Scriptures, or kneeled by the bed-side of the sick to lead in prayer, or conducted the funeral services of the dead—and in all these ways he ministered to the Church—he was enabled to do all in such a way as to endear him to God's people, and greatly to honor the office to which the Holy Ghost had called him. God spared this good man to us until the war was over, and something of order restored to the Church again, and then, in January, 1867, he "entered into his rest."

For these reasons, whilst our Church suffered greatly by the war, it did not suffer as much as some other churches in the city. When the war was over, and our absent members had generally returned to their homes again, we had about two hundred communicants left us—

along with the Pastor, and frequently, private members of the Church came with inquiring friends; but with these exceptions, the meet- just about the same number we had ten years before, when the pestilence had done its work. Again had God, in his providence, "thrown down the building of years;" yet could we say, "though troubled, we are not distressed; though perplexed, we are not in despair; though cast down, we are not destroyed."

As one of the first fruits of returning prosperity to our Church, the people were able, in the Summer of 1869, to resume work upon our Church building. In 1858 we had begun to remodel, I might almost say, to rebuild our house of worship; not attempting to do the work all at once, but only as we were able to make payment for it. This work was continued during the Summer of 1860, and then interrupted by the war. In 1869, ten years after it was begun, the work was resumed and the spire of the Church built, and so the building was completed; and when I say completed, I mean paid for as well as built.

During the latter part of 1870, and throughout March, 1871, God blessed our Church with a remarkable revival of religion, and to some brief historical notes on this revival I will now ask your attention: Early in the Autumn of 1870, indications for good, appeared in the increased size of our congregations, and in the greater attention with which the preached Gospel was listened to. By the first of January such serious attention to religion was shown, as led to the appointment of a meeting in the Pastor's study for such as desired particular instruction in Gospel truth, God's way of salvation for sinners; and the meetings thus begun were continued every Sabbath afternoon for a period of five months.

At the first of these meetings thirteen were present, and from that they increased in numbers, one or more being added every Sabbath, until from thirty to forty were regularly present. In these meetings no attempt was made at personal conversation, but after singing and prayer, some practical topic, of especial interest to those inquiring after "the way of life," was made the subject of remark, such, for example, as the nature of true conviction of sin, and its place and purpose in conversion to God, the nature of saving faith, and the Scriptural evidences of regeneration; and then with prayer the meeting was dismissed. Opportunities for private conversation with those who attended these meetings were sought and obtained at other times.

Usually some one or more of the Elders attended these meetings ings were made up exclusively of those who were inquiring after the way of salvation. I kept a record of the names of all who came to these meetings, in order that I might know whom to visit throughout the week, and on looking over that record, at the close of the revival, I found that those who attended, almost without exception, afterwards came forward and made a public profession of faith in Christ; not all at one time, but all before the revival had ceased.

With the exception of this Sabbath afternoon meeting in the Pastor's study, there were no extra services in the Church, and the preaching, with the the exception of a single sermon in May, was all by the Pastor, God's blessing throughout this revival coming as a blessing upon the diligent and faithful use of the ordinary means of grace. What renders this the more remarkable is, that the year before we had held a protracted meeting, and had with us a brother who preached night after night for a week, and preached, as it seemed to me, some of the best sermons I ever listened to; and yet, in so far as I could learn, his preaching did not result in the conversion of a single soul to God. If I attempt to explain this, I am compelled to trace it, not so much to any difference in the preaching from that of ordinary times, as to a difference in the praying, the praying of the Church. In the first great Christian revival in Jerusalem, of which we have an account in the opening portion of Acts, the Spirit begins the story with the record: "They went up into an upper room, where abode both Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew, Philip, and Thomas, Bartholomew, and Matthew, James the son of Alpheus, and Simon Zelotes, and Judas the brother of James. These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary, the mother of James, and with his brethren." Acts 1:13,14. And such, I believe, is the history of the beginning of every great revival of religion, from that day to this.

At our regular February communion that year, thirty-eight were added to our numbers; at an extra communion in April, thirty-one were added; at our regular communion in May, twenty-one, and in the course of the year closing with February, seventeen more, in all one hundred and seven, most of whom were added on profession of faith in Christ. This number embraced persons of every age, from the man of more than eighty years, tottering on the brink of the grave, to the child of eleven; the oldest and youngest it had been my privilege to admit to the Lord's table stood side by side, as they

made their public profession of faith in Christ. An unusually large proportion of the number admitted were persons of middle age, settled in life, and the heads of families. Of the number then gathered into the Church, "the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep."

The especial lessons of this revival, as it seems to me, are *first*, that a true revival is not the work of one man, in so far as human instrumentality is concerned, but the work of a united living Church, a Church in which pastor and people "continue with one accord in prayer and supplication ; and, *second*, that there is no need to await some season of extra service, desirable as such extra service may be at certain times, or the coming of some celebrated preacher or evangelist, in order that we may pray for and expect a revival of religion. God can hear our prayers, and bless the ordinary means of grace to the abundant revival of a Church, and the salvation of many souls. Brethren, let us remember these lessons, that we may live and labor accordingly.

Shortly after the close of this revival, and as the fruits of it, in July, 1872, a colony was sent out, and organized by Presbytery, under the name of the Second Presbyterian Church, of Norfolk. This colony consisted of fifty-five members, fifty joining in the organization in the beginning, and five more uniting with them when they were ready to occupy their new house of worship. For nearly a year after their organization, the new Church continued to worship with us, and it was not until June, 1873, that Neander M. Woods, their Pastor, reached Norfolk, and their separate existence was fully inaugurated. From the first, they have been a self-sustaining Church, and they have increased in numbers, until they reported to Presbytery, in April last, one hundred and nine communicants.

Such is a brief sketch of the history of our Church for the twenty-years last passed ; and with this history before us, let us see what are the fruits of these twenty-five years of life and labor on the part of the Church :

The number of names on the "Roll" just published, is almost the same with that on the "Roll" published twenty-five years ago. Does this mean that there has been nothing accomplished in all these years, if we estimate the work done by a Church by the number of names on the communion roll ? By no means. During these twenty-five years this Church has sent out two colonies, viz : the High Street Church, Portsmouth, which, as already stated, after growing stead-

ily until it had almost become a self-sustaining Church, was so weakened by losses during the war, that at the close of that season of sore trial, it united with the Middle Street Church, in like condition, and formed the present Church of Portsmouth. This Church is now a self-sustaining Church, and reported to Presbytery, in April, one hundred and three communicants. One moiety of this Church may fairly be considered an outgrowth of our Church during the period under review. The Second Presbyterian Church of Norfolk is also an outgrowth of our Church during the same period. Adding to the number on our own communion roll, the number on the roll of the Second Church, and one-half the number on the roll of the Portsmouth Church, we have four hundred and thirty communicants now, against two hundred and seventy-four, twenty-five years ago. This shows a rate of increase greater than that of the population of the two cities for these years, and fully equal, I think, to that of any other Church in either of the cities.

If we turn from the absolute increase in numbers, to the rate of increase, the result is equally cheering; and as under our Presbyterian system, our increase comes as a result of instruction given in God's truth in the family, the Sabbath School and the Church, "precept upon precept, line upon line, here a little and there a little," the rate of increase is as good a test of the efficiency of a Church as its absolute increase in numbers. From a careful examination of our records I find, that during the first ten years of the period under review, our increase was one hundred and forty-six, or an average of something over fourteen a year. During the last ten years it has been two hundred and forty-two, or an average of over twenty-four a year. Last year our additions numbered twenty; the year before, twenty-three, thus showing that the increased ratio of addition during the last ten years is not altogether owing to the great revival.

Look now at the efficiency of the Church, at the beginning and close of these twenty-five years, as measured by its Sabbath School labors; and as this is a department of Church labor, in which the private members are the chief workers, it furnishes a very good means of judging of the advance or decline in the efficiency of a Church. In 1851 we had a large Sabbath School at the Church, and a Mission School, which met in a rented room on upper Church street. Now we have as large a Sabbath School at the Church, and two Mission Schools, meeting in Chapels erected for their use. The Second Church has a flourising School at the Church, with a Mission School

meeting in a neat Chapel in Atlantic City. The Portsmouth Church has a flourishing Sabbath School at the Church, and has recently completed a handsome and commodious Chapel in connection with a Mission School which it has maintained for a year past. Reckoning now, as before, the Second Church, and one-half the Portsmouth Church as an outgrowth of our Church during these twenty-five years, and we have six Sabbath Schools and three Chapels built and paid for, now, against two Schools and no Chapel twenty-five years ago.

"Honor the Lord with thy substance and with the first fruits of thine increase" (Prov. 3:9), is the instruction of inspired Solomon under the Old Testament dispensation. "Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give, not grudgingly, or of necessity; for God loveth a cheerful giver" (II. Cor., 9:7), writes Paul under the New Testament dispensation; and James adds: "Whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him" (James 3:17). In such emphatic terms do the Scriptures teach us that giving to the Lord of our substance is an evidence of life in the individual Christian, and in the Church as well.

During the year closing with April 1st, 1851, the last year of Dr. S. J. P. Anderson's ministry, the amount contributed by this Church, for all purposes, as reported to Presbytery, was $3,085. I take the contributions of this year, and not of the first year of my ministry, because my first year with you was a broken year, when the Church was for a time without a Pastor, and so the contributions fell below the average, whilst those of the year I have taken are a fair average of the contributions at that time. During the year closing April 1st, 1876, as reported to Presbytery, our Church contributed, for all purposes, $5,538; the Second Church, $3,824; the Portsmouth Church, $3,416. Adding, now, to our contributions, those of the Second Church, and one-half those of the Portsmouth Church, we have $11,070 given to the Lord during the year just passed, against $3,085 given twenty-five years ago.

Judging in any of these ways, by the number of communicants, by the annual rate of increase, by the Church's labor in the Sabbath School, or by the amount given to the Lord from year to year, our Church, to-day occupies a position much in advance of that of twenty-five years ago; and as we remember all the circumstances

under which this advance has been made, we can but exclaim, "What Hath God Wrought ?"

I have dwelt at some length upon these facts, not in any spirit of vain-glorious boasting, but because, in reviewing the history of these twenty-five years, we have had to remember God's sore chastisements of our Church in "the Pestilence" and in "the war ;" to recall times when all things seemed to be against us, and God's own hand threw down the work of years. Twice in the course of these years have I been called to stand in this pulpit, when from Sabbath to Sabbath my heart was made sad by the sight of many vacant seats in all parts of the house ; the vacant seats of those whom God had taken from us. I have no great respect for the philosophy which always looks at the dark side of events and never at the bright. I do not believe that the piety is of the most Scriptural type which habitually remembers the evil received at the hands of the Lord, and forgets the good. Brethren, if the history of these years furnishes us occasion to humble ourselves before God, it furnishes equal occasion to rejoice in "God most high, who performeth all things for us."

In conclusion, there are two thoughts suggested by this review of our history, to which I would ask your attention for a few moments :

The first, I cannot better express than in the language of Scripture, "The things which are seen are temporal, the things which are not seen," and they alone, "are eternal" (II. Cor., 4-18). The months when the Pestilence raged in our city were months of sore trial and deep affliction ; and yet I remember them, as I doubt not do some of you, as months of great spiritual peace. Lifted above the murky atmosphere of the world, the heavenly Jerusalem seemed very near. A light brighter than that of the sun seemed glinted back from its walls of precious stones, and all appeared very real. So was it with the long years of war. Years of sore trial they were, and yet years in which God sustained and comforted his people ; and Heaven seemed but a little way off. The months of pestilence and the years of war have passed. Health blesses our city, and peace has been restored to the land. And yet, to-day, the things of earth, its pleasures, its wealth, its honors, are no more substantial, and we hold them with no more certain grasp than we did when we knew that the red hand of war might rend them from us at any moment, or the pestilence might hurry us from them "to return to the dust from which we were taken." Oh, that all might heed the voice of God's

providence in these years, as it repeats the solemn question once asked by the Lord Jesus: "What shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" (Mark 8:36.)

The second thought suggested by the review is this: Our God is a God to be trusted. He has said: "When thou passeth through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee; when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned, neither shall the flame kindle upon thee. For I am the Lord thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour" (Isaiah 43:2,3). And what he has said he will make good. His promise is sure to such as trust him. This, brethren, has been our experience throughout these years. As we remember all the way by which he has led us can we not say—

"Lord, I would not be much concerned,
Nor vainly long to see,
In volumes of thy deep decrees,
What months are writ for me."

As we call to mind the power of his love as made known to us in days of trial, can we not make our own the language of the triumphant Apostle: "I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:37,9).

APPENDIX.

NOTE A, p. 12.—Just what was meant by "praying for the President of the United States," as that phrase was used by General Butler and his Aid-de-Camp, Captain George P. Edgar, may be learned from the following extracts from my examinations before them, as published at the time :

"QUES. 18. Have you determined not to pray for or allude to the President of the United States, the authorities or the armies and navies thereof, that they may be successful in all their efforts to put down this wicked rebellion?

ANS. I have.

QUES. 19. Do you think this a wicked rebellion?

ANS. I do not." *Examination before Captain Edgar.*

"GENERAL. You said you would not willingly open your Church to any recognized minister of the Gospel from such denominations as before the war, you would have exchanged with, did you know he would pray for the Union, and and against the Rebels?

MR. A. Yes, sir." *Examination before General Butler.*

NOTE B. p. 12.—

"HEADQUARTERS, PROVOST MARSHAL'S OFFICE, DISTRICT OF VIRGINIA,
NORFOLK, MARCH 9TH, 1864.

"Owing to the vacancy of the pulpit of the Presbyterian Church of this city, caused by the deposing of its late Pastor, the Rev. George D. Armstrong, D. D., by action of the Commanding General, the Rev. C. L. Woodworth, Chaplain of the Twenty-seventh Regiment, Massachusetts Volunteers, will officiate until further orders. It is not doubted that the true loyalists of the congregation will approve of this change, and cheerfully co-operate in the usual services of the Church. The Church officials will continue on duty as usual, in their respective spheres.

CHARLES M. WHELDON.

Lieutenant Colonel and Provost Marshal."

To the credit of Rev. C. L. Woodworth I would add, that finding his services were not acceptable to the congregation, after officiating for a few Sabbaths, he was, at his own request, returned to his regiment again, and the Church building was thus left in the hands of the proper officers of the Church.

NOTE C. p. 13.—"*Of my subsequent hard imprisonment I feel differently.*" By this I mean, such an imprisonment was not a military necessity; nor do I think that it was inflicted on me in that view of the case, but solely to gratify the personal ill-will of General B. F. Butler.

July 21st, 1861, was set apart by the Confederate Congress, then assembled in Richmond, as a day of thanksgiving for the victory of Manassas, and was generally observed throughout the Southern States. All the Churches in Norfolk were opened and service held appropriate to the occasion, My sermon preached on that day was subsequently published, by request of the congregation. In that sermon, and as illustrating what seemed to be the good providence of God toward us, I said: "From the battle-field of Bethel, Brigadier General Hill wrote: 'Our Heavenly Father has wonderfully interposed to shield our heads in the day of battle.' In all that battle, we lost not one killed, but one mortally wounded (Wyatt died after the battle was over), and seven or eight slightly wounded; whilst the enemy lost so many that they have never been willing to publish the official account of their loss, but judging from what I have heard and read from persons in the battle, and in the neighborhood for several days after the battle, I should say not less than five hundred in killed and wounded — probably more."

"In all the attacks which have been made upon our batteries about Norfolk, and the firing from the great rifle-canon at Fortress Calhoun, not one of our men, thus far, has been kill or seriously wounded."

As General Benjamin F. Butler was in command at Fortress Monroe at the time, and the battle of Bethel was fought under his direction, and the attacks upon our batteries around Norfolk must have been of his ordering, these statements of mine were damaging to his military reputation, and because true, none the less damaging.

My reason for believing that these statements were the ground of a personal ill-will, which found vent in my hard imprisonment, I will lay before the reader:

1st. My sentence, as published in *The New Regime*, of March 29th, 1864, "the official journal of the Department," was in the words: "(To an Aide) Make an order that this man be committed to the guard-house, in close confinement, there to remain until he can be consigned to Fort Hatteras, there to be kept in solitary confinement until further orders; and send a copy of this examination to the officer in command there." The reader will notice that in this sentence, there is no offence specified; and if he will read over the "examination" refered to, he will find that there is no word or act of mine charged as an offence.

2d. At my examination before Captain Edgar, I was questioned about this sermon, and requested to furnish a copy, which I did. In Captain Edgar's report to his commanding officer—a copy of which I have now lying before me—he writes: "Accompanying, please find a record of his investigation made by me February 22d, witnessed by several of my clerks, and a copy of a thanksgiving sermon preached by him on the 'Victory of Manassas,' upon the recommendation of the Confederate Congress, July 21st, 1861."

In my examination before General Butler, as published in *The New Regime*, he says: "Now, sir, while you did preach a very virulent sermon upon 'the Victory of Manassas,' at the recommendation of the Confederate Congress, have you ever since preached in you pulpit a sermon favorable to the Union cause?"

After I had been in prison several months, and fruitless efforts had been made by friends to secure my release, Mrs. Dr. Mallory, an excellent Christian lady, but not a member of my Church, thinking, for certain reasons, that there was some prospect of success in such an effort, headed a petition for my release with her own name, and presented it to General Butler in person. After retaining it for a few days he returned it with the following indorsement, viz:

"1. Dr. Armstrong is the author of a book advocating the divine right of slavery.

2. He preached and published a sermon on occasion of the Rebel Victory of Manassas, which contains false and disloyal statements.

3. He has confessed most disloyal sentiments to my Aid-de-Campe and to me.

I therefore say, as I believe the Judge will say at the last day, 'let him go to his own place.' BENJ. F. BUTLER, Major General, U. S. A."

The first charge might have some weight in securing my hard imprisonment at the hands of an honest, though fanatical Abolitionist, but surely no man can regard General Butler as an honest Abolitionist who remembers that in 1860, he was a leading Democrat, and at the Charleston Convention voted time after time for the nomination of Jefferson Davis for President of the United States.

As to the third charge, no one knew better than General Butler, that my "disloyal sentiments" were the sentiments of nine-tenths of the citizens of Norfolk.

The second charge alone furnishes any explanation of the "virulent" animus of the closing words of the above quoted indorsement.

By the officers of the United States Army, with the exception of General Butler, I was always treated politely, and of the course they pursued toward me I have no occasion to complain. My hard imprisonment, as already said, I trace to General Butler's personal ill-will, occasioned by my telling the truth, and putting it in print so as to be beyond his power to blot it out, respecting his incompetency as a military commander, manifested in his attacks upon the Confederate batteries near Norfolk and his battle of Bethel.